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COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
Forty-eighth session
Agenda item 10 (a)

QUESTION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF ALL PERSONS SUBJECTED TO ANY FORM OF DETENTION OR IMPRISONMENT, IN PARTICULAR: TORTURE AND OTHER CRUEL, INHUMAN OR DEGRADING TREATMENT OR PUNISHMENT

United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture

Note by the Secretary-General

1. The Commission on Human Rights, at its forty-seventh session, adopted Resolution 1991/36, entitled "United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture", in which it, inter alia, requested the Secretary-General to keep it informed of the operations of the Fund on an annual basis. Pursuant to that request, the Secretary-General draws to the Commission's attention the report of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture submitted to the General Assembly at its forty-sixth session and contained in document A/46/618 and Corr.1 (updated to 30 November 1991), as well as General Assembly Resolution 46/110 of 17 December 1991. These documents are available to the Commission.

2. The following contributions were recorded between 30 November 1991 and 31 December 1991, after the report to the General Assembly was issued:

Government	Contribution (United States dollars)	
Argentina	4,000 for 1990	3rd contribution
	2,996 for 1991	4th "
Germany	126,103 for 1991	9th "
Sweden	169,097 for 1990	5th "

3. Additionally, during the same period, the following Governments pledged contributions:

Government	Contribution pledged
Germany	US$ 119,049 for 1992 9 prior contributions (see para. 2 above)
Japan	US$ 50,000 for 1991 5 prior contributions (see A/46/618/Corr.1)
Liechtenstein	US$ 6,803 for 1992 1 contribution pledge and 3 prior contributions (see A/46/618, para. 6)
Netherlands	100,000 guilders for 1991 9 prior contributions US$ 52,632 for 1992 (see A/46/618, para. 5)
Switzerland	35,000 Swiss francs for 1992 5 prior contributions (see A/46/618/Corr.1)
United States of America	US$ 50,000 for 1992 4 contribution pledges and 3 prior contributions (see A/46/618, para. 6)

4. During this period, a contribution of US$ 125 was received from the Marymount Manhattan College (New York, United States of America) as a gesture of appreciation for a talk given by Mrs. Ellissavet Stamatopoulou-Robbins.

5. Contributions were also received from Mr. José Balea (New York, United States of America - US$ 50) and from Mrs. Ethel North (Kelliher, Saskatchewan, Canada - Can$ 150, representing her twentieth contribution).

6. The Secretariat received from the Chairman of the Board of Trustees a statement delivered at the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture, which contains additional information on the Fund's activities and which is annexed to this note.

Annex

STATEMENT BY MR. JAAP A. WALKATE,
CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF THE
UNITED NATIONS VOLUNTARY FUND FOR VICTIMS OF TORTURE
AT THE CANADIAN CENTRE FOR VICTIMS OF TORTURE'S
VOLUNTEER RECOGNITION NIGHT
TORONTO, 8 NOVEMBER 1991

Thank you for inviting me to your Volunteer Recognition Night, because this is an event where I feel at home: volunteer among volunteers, worker against torture among workers against torture, human rights activist among human rights activists.

The combat by the United Nations against the pernicious evil of torture already has a long history. It began by outlawing torture in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1966 and it has never ended. Everybody knows that torture is such a widespread phenomenon that there is every reason to continue the battle.

In the early 1970s, the General Assembly of the United Nations developed a comprehensive programme for the elimination of torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment and the further elaboration of international norms in the decades that were to follow. This programme resulted in the course of the past years in a set of moral, political and legal obligations to be adhered to by States, organizations and individuals. In 1975, a Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Being Subjected to Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment was adopted by the United Nations and was used as the basis for a convention which was concluded in 1984. The essence of the Convention against Torture is that States are under an obligation to take legislative and administrative measures to prevent acts of torture and to declare such acts offences under its criminal law.

People who violate such laws shall be prosecuted and, if found guilty, punished. An international committee is set up under the Convention to monitor the implementation of these laws. Today over 50 States Members of the United Nations are parties to that Convention, out of a total of 165 members. This is still far too few in the light of reports by an organization such as Amnesty International according to which torture is still actively practised in more than 100 countries.

In addition to the adoption of this Convention the United Nations has also appointed a Special Rapporteur to examine questions relevant to torture, to seek and receive credible and reliable information on such questions and to respond to such information without delay. The Special Rapporteur tries to establish contacts with Governments on the basis of information that he receives about the practice of torture, which may lead him in certain cases to take urgent action with regard to governments which are under suspicion of committing or condoning torture. Such urgent action may take the form of a telegram or a visit to the country concerned, either confidentially or in the open, by way of mobilizing public opinion. So much for the international

measures to prevent the occurrence of torture, measures which are rather well put on paper in good legal form, but which in many cases lack sufficient implementation - as you all know only too well.

One of the means to mitigate the effects of torture on the victims and their families is to give them financial, medical, psychological and social aid. It is widely recognized that victims of crimes - and that is what torture is - need more attention and rehabilitation than the perpetrators. It was with this in mind that the General Assembly established in 1978 the Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture in Chile; the Fund's mandate was enlarged in 1981 to cover victims of torture anywhere in the world. Humanitarian, legal and financial aid must be directed through established channels of assistance to the victims and/or their families.

The Fund is administered by the Secretary-General and his staff, assisted by a Board of Trustees composed of a Chairman and four members who have wide experience in the field of human rights, serve in their personal capacity and come each from one of the five regions recognized within the United Nations. The Board is currently composed of experts from Costa Rica, Jordan, Kenya, the Netherlands and Yugoslavia. They meet once a year to study requests for aid submitted in the course of the year and offer their advice and recommendations to the Secretary-General.

The Fund obtains the bulk of its money from States Members of the Unites Nations, which are under no obligation ("Voluntary Fund") to contribute. Fortunately, a yearly increasing number of Governments decide to contribute to the Fund, more and more so on a regular basis and in similar amounts, which makes it possible for the Board of Trustees to plan ahead and to commit itself in the long run. Contributions have also been received from private individuals and non-governmental organizations. In the Netherlands, a special bank account was opened under the auspices of the Dutch branch of the International Commission of Jurists.

Since its creation, the Fund has collaborated with over 50 organizations which altogether submitted some 100 projects and sub-projects for implementation in 40 countries. These projects fall essentially into the following fields: psychotherapy, medical care, social rehabilitation and training of professionals (doctors, psychologists, psychotherapists, paramedical personnel, social workers, etc.) and scientific research for the specialized treatment of torture victims. Besides the torture victims themselves, the Fund has been able to help the relatives of victims who also suffer psychologically, economically and socially. Furthermore, it has assisted with the development and application of suitable treatment for torture victims.

The Fund supports a variety of projects. Some of them are rather big clinics or centres for counselling, socio-psychological workshops, such as those in Copenhagen, London, Paris and Toronto where hundreds of new survivors are registered every year; on the basis of yearly requests for assistance, each one receives contributions from the Fund in the range of several tens of thousands of United States dollars. A new medical project was started in Berlin where large numbers of survivors are expected in the future due to the developments in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

The great majority of the projects are relatively small in size, although no less important on that account, many of them in countries where torture was until fairly recently government policy, such as Argentina, Chile, Uruguay or countries where torture is still practised either with or without the consent of the Government. Such projects are sometimes carried out under most difficult circumstances, in far away places, and with too many patients for small staffs often consisting of volunteers. Correspondence with these projects is seldom without difficulties.

In the course of the years, the Board of Trustees and the United Nations staff have developed methods of assessing the bona fides of new projects, of evaluating budgets submitted, of setting conditions in terms of quality of aid, bookkeeping and reporting. Indeed, the Board exercises the utmost care in studying the financial reports and the reports on activities, before advising the Secretary-General to release grants to projects. As a matter of fact, in a very small number of cases, regular contributions have been suspended because of unsatisfactory methods of reporting or no reporting at all.

In order to give an impression of the scale of the activities of the Fund, the following figures should suffice. Since it began its operations in 1983, well over 200 grants totalling over US$ 6 million have been authorized for projects. For the year 1991, over 70 new grants were made corresponding to some 60 projects representing an amount of some US$ 2 million. Every year, States Members of the United Nations have to decide on their voluntary contribution to the Fund; fortunately there is a fairly constant flow of resources into the Fund. However, it is clear that there will never be enough money to help all the victims of torture in the world. Some people with enormous traumas, both physical and mental, need professional help for many years. What we know from the project leaders who are heard by the Board is that with United Nations funding a sizeable number of people can be helped to start a new life, to make that life tolerable and to come to peace with the society they live in. Such statements are encouraging but do not diminish in the least the need to eliminate torture at the root.

In order to give you an impression of some of the projects the Fund is dealing with, I will take you through a couple of examples.

The League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in Geneva, Switzerland, has submitted for funding a handbook for help to refugees and asylum seekers, a training manual for people dealing with survivors. The Fund has gladly contributed to the publication which will be of interest to you all, although it might not contain in every respect new material for the Toronto staff. However, it struck me as rather practical in its approach and I quote from the text of a chapter on "Stress in refugees and asylum seekers":

> "Perhaps the most difficult subject to talk about is sexual assault. This type of torture is a common occurrence amongst women, although men are not excluded. To humiliate women and men in their sexuality is to attack the person's innermost being. For many women and

men, sexual life becomes a shameful memory. Women do not dare to go to a gynaecologist, being afraid of being touched. They may not see a doctor for years and as most torturers are men, to see a male gynaecologist is out of the question.

A South American refugee woman in Sweden, tortured in body and mind, had not dared to see a gynaecologist for over 10 years following her sexual torture. She did however suffer from internal pain and her doctor referred her to a woman gynaecologist who was prepared to listen to the woman's terrible story. When she got to the consulting room, however, the refugee just could not speak, although she knew Swedish well. The specialist encouraged her: 'Tell me in Spanish'. The woman began to talk, and went on for a long time. When her words ebbed away, the doctor said kindly 'Now, could you tell me in Swedish, I'm afraid I don't understand Spanish'. The gynaecologist had understood that the woman first had to formulate the whole story in her mother tongue. This led to an atmosphere of sympathy and understanding which allowed the refugee woman to recount the story once again in Swedish and thus exteriorize and communicate her traumatic experience."

One of the biggest projects is the support of the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture in London which is managed by Ms. Helen Bamber and Dr. Rodriguez. The Foundation does not receive funds from the British Government and has to find its own finances wherever it can. Many of the Foundation's clients are indirect victims. That is to say that they mostly have been forced to watch torture of members of their families and friends. In five years, the Foundation cared for between 2,500 and 3,000 victims. The clients come from all over the world, from over 40 countries with names which must be very familiar to you all. Ms. Helen Bamber's work at this centre consists in substantiating claims of asylum seekers and supervising voluntary staff, psychiatrists, doctors, interpreters, etc. The centre offers family and couple therapy where one partner has been sexually tortured.

Talking about families who survive torture, I should mention a project undertaken and sponsored by the Rehabilitation Centre for Torture Victims in Copenhagen, which investigates the after-effects of a family member's imprisonment and torture upon the interpersonal patterns in the family with special reference to the impact of the psychological development of children. Since 1989, the RCT has participated in an international project called "Children in crisis" which aims at coordinating multinational, multicultural research efforts concerning the effects on children. Such research is needed to more effectively prevent the violation of human rights of children and to be better prepared to offset the consequences for the individual child.

Another centre that concentrates on victims of torture and family members is the Centre for Victims of Torture, Minneapolis, United States. The Centre for Victims of Torture is a non-profit-making organization that treats survivors of politically motivated torture and their family members; it is the first treatment centre of its kind in the country. The Centre's staff of six full-time and seven part-time employees is made up of an interdisciplinary team that includes a psychiatrist, a physician, a psychologist and a social worker.

Eight thousand torture victims live in Minnesota. Clients come from all over the world: 50 per cent from Africa; 15 percent from Southeast Asia; 15 per cent from Latin America; 15 per cent from the Middle East and Eastern Europe; with the remaining 5 per cent being United States citizens who were tortured abroad. Care is currently provided free on an outpatient basis only for about 32 people per month. Treatment is tailored to meet individual needs: it can include medical treatment, psychotherapy and help in gaining economic and legal stability.

The Centre for Victims of Torture is dedicated to providing direct treatment for survivors of government-sponsored torture. This includes researching effective rehabilitation methods, providing professional training to other care providers and contributing to the prevention of torture through public education and cooperation with other human rights organizations.

Over the years, it has become clear that to treat patients who are victims of torture requires a special skill and involves a variety of disciplines. It is therefore of special importance that those who are experienced in this field are willing to transmit their knowledge and skills to others. For that purpose, regular training courses, academic conferences and workshops are being organized in all parts of the world and subsidized by the Fund. Only last month, a regional Asian Conference on Rehabilitation of Torture Victims was held in Islamabad, Pakistan. In that country, it has been possible to set up an organization of medical professionals, called Voice Against Torture (VAT), which has established a centre for the rehabilitation of torture victims that functions well and has seen more than 700 patients during the first year of its existence.

Finally I should like to refer to the need for scientific research into the reasons why people engage in torture, why they use their human creativity for the destruction of other human beings. This research is necessary in order to be in a better position to treat victims of torture well. The Fund has already been approached by one or two institutions to subsidize such research. This sort of activity is of lesser priority in the overall framework of providing aid to victims of torture, but its importance in the long run should not be underestimated. I am pleased to say that Dr. Allodi of your Centre has shown considerable interest in both fields.

In conclusion, let me make it very clear that none of these projects could have been realized without the commitment and sacrifice of hundreds and thousands of volunteers willing to give their time, energy and money to help fellow men and women who have been humiliated, physically and psychologically harmed and who may have lost most if not all faith in mankind. Money cannot buy trust, money cannot heal wounds, money cannot make people forget the unspeakable and the unforgettable, but survivors who are lucky enough to find help in your Centre or other centres - I say lucky because there are 10 unattended survivors for every one that is treated in one of the centres - do feel the extra warmth, care and devotion that volunteers add to the professional treatment they undergo. The Board of Trustees, composed of five volunteers in Geneva, realizes that it is able to do its work - spreading the small amount of funds available over the large number of projects - only because of the work which volunteers like you perform all over the world. It is the result of this work which enables me to be here tonight.